Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers

Volume 9 | Issue 2 Article 1

4-1-1992

Philosophy and the Bible: The Areopagus Speech

Marilyn McCord Adams

PHILOSOPHY AND THE BIBLE: THE AREOPAGUS SPEECH

Marilyn McCord Adams

Philosophy does not get much coverage in the Bible, but what there is seems to give it a bad press. If Colossians 2:8 seems to lump philosophy with deceitful human tradition, the harmonization of Paul's experience at Athens (in Acts 17) with I Corinthians 1-2 has seemed to many to imply that philosophical apologetics is wrong-headed, and should yield the field exclusively to kerygmatic preaching. This interpretation challenges the legitimacy of the Society of Christian Philosophers' main aim: to integrate faith with philosophy! In this paper, I apply the methods of Biblical criticism to the Areopagus speech, and concede (from an examination of parallels and sources) that the speech does attempt to meet philosophers on their own ground. On the other hand, I argue that attention to the normative structure of the Acts-speeches and to their deployment of proof texts, suggests a missionary strategy that—so far from being inimical to the methods and purposes of our Society—can be seen to coincide with them!

1. *Introduction*

Although philosophy does not get much coverage in the Bible, what there is seems to give it a bad press. For instance, there is that deutero-Pauline warning in Colossians 2:8: "See to it that no one makes a prey of you by philosophy and empty deceit according to human tradition...and not according to Christ." Many commentators[1] have read the Acts 17 story of Paul at Athens in the same spirit. They note that, by contrast with other speeches in Acts, (i) Paul's Areopagus oration contains no references to God's special providences towards His chosen people; instead His role as creator and sustainer and His relations with humankind generally are underscored.[2] Moreover, (ii) its proof texts (17:28) are taken, not from the Bible, but from Greek poets. (iii) Finally, this speech nowhere mentions the names 'Jesus' and 'Christ'; the death of Jesus is entirely passed over, while His resurrection is referred to only in connection with His appointment as eschatological judge.[3] These features suggest to such commentators that (*T1*) the Areopagus speech was an attempt to meet the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers (17:18) on their own ground. But, they conclude, (*T2*) this missionary strategy was a failure, because it won few converts (17:32-34). Harmonizing the Acts with I Corinthians 1-2, they take (*T3*) Paul himself to have

FAITH AND PHILOSOPHY
Vol. 9 No. 2 April 1992

repented of this approach, and to have returned to kerygmatic preaching, starting with his very next stop in Corinth (cf. 18:1):

> "When I came to you, brethren, I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in much fear and trembling; and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God." (I Cor 2:1-5)

Understanding Paul's contrast between worldly and Divine wisdom (I Cor 1:18-25) to deny the power of culture to commend faith in Jesus Christ, they (*T4*) deny philosophy any positive role in apologetics, and draw the moral that (*T5*) it is wrong to try to mix faith with philosophy, thereby calling into question the attempt of our Society of Christian Philosophers to integrate the two.

Such readings pose a problem for Christian philosophers, because as Christians we regard the Bible as somehow authoritative. We would not make it our professional aim to join together what the Bible definitively puts asunder. Nevertheless, if we are disposed to take the advice of Scripture to heart, we should be motivated to approach Scripture with the same methodological conscientiousness as we do the analysis of arguments. My happy contention is that careful scrutiny of the Areopagus speech will undermine not only the above-mentioned common interpretation, but also its consequent maxims about missionary strategy.

2. *The Setting in Acts*

The Areopagus speech occurs roughly in the middle of the missionary journey of Paul and Silas: Corinth, Ephesus, and Macedonia lie ahead; Philippi, Thessalonica, Beroea, behind. The tour of duty had begun in a controversy that led to the split-up of Paul and Barnabas and the formation of new teams—Barnabas took John Mark and Paul was joined by Silas (15:36-41) and later by Timothy (16:1-3). The exorcism at Philippi had brought beatings, imprisonment, and an eventual apology from the magistrates (16:16-40). The preaching at Thessalonica had produced division between converts and jealous Jews who stirred such trouble with the city government that Paul and Silas had to escape by night (17:1-9). And the initial success of the mission to Beroea had been interrupted by Thessalonian Jews who had followed them (17:10-13) and had made it advisable for Paul to leave town right away (17:14-15). Thus, we find Paul "cooling his heels" in Athens and awaiting the arrival of his companions.

The speech is given in Athens, a "city full of idols" (17:16), "the citadel where pagan religion and philosophy were entrenched."[4] While in Athens, Paul apparently spoke to three different groups: (i) with Jews and-devout

persons in the synagogue (17:17), (ii) with Epicurean and Stoic philosophers (17:18), and (iii) with the general public, whoever chanced to come to the market place (17:17), the general run of curious, novelty-seeking Athenians and foreigners (17:21). What makes the text so apt for our purposes is that Luke passes over the reaction of the Athenian synagogue to focus on the reactions of pagan philosophers and the adherents of popular Greek religion.[5] Scholars speculate on why Luke singles out Epicureans and Stoics from the philosophical plenum based at Athens: whether because he thought these two schools were the most influential at the time[6]; or alternatively because their doctrines are alluded to in the speech.[7]

When Luke says that some "men of Athens" "brought" Paul "to the Areopagus" (17:19), his reference is ambiguous. For while 'Areopagus' originally names a hill west of Acropolis, it also came to be the name of the ancient and honorable Athenian governing body that met there. Originally, the Areopagus functioned as the Athenian senate, but lost power during periods of increasing democracy. During the first century A.D., it continued to have jurisdiction over religion, morals, and homicide within the city, but may have met in the royal portico in the market place.[8]

On the reading of some scholars, 17:19 means only that the Athenians took Paul to the hill in order to have a quiet place to talk.[9] Others say that Paul was *brought* and *invited* to expound his teaching before the Athenian court.[10] A minority has argued that Paul faced an official trial in Athens before the Areopagus, analogous to the proceedings involving Peter and John before the Sanhedrin (4:5-22; 5:17-32) or a little later of Paul himself (22:30-23:10).[11] After all, they actually "seized" or "took hold of" Paul (17:19). Could not this, among other considerations, suggest that the situation in Athens constituted for Paul "a real threat"?[12] Gärtner makes the attractive suggestion that Paul was making an appearance before an informal session of the religion sub-committee of the Areopagus.[13] If so, Luke does not represent it as a closed hearing, since the speech is addressed to "Men of Athens" (apparently) generally (17:22).

3. *Parallels, Pagan and Biblical*

(3.1) *Hellenistic Connections:* The argument for (*T1*) construing the Areopagus speech as an attempt to meet philosophers on their own turf begins with its Hellenistic flavor as exemplified in the two proof-texts from Greek poets (17:28). The first is attributed to Epimenides the Cretan, who denounces his fellow Cretans for their impiety in claiming to have found the tomb of Zeus on Crete:

> "They fashioned a tomb for thee, O holy and high one—
> The Cretans, always liars, evil beasts, idle bellies!
> But thou art not dead; thou livest and abidest forever.
> For *in thee we live and move and have our being.*"[14]

The second, by the Cilecian Aratus, is likewise heavily influenced by Stoicism and celebrates Zeus:

> "Let us begin with Zeus: never, O man, let us have him unmentioned. Full of Zeus are all the ways and meeting places of men; the sea and the harbours are full of him. It is with Zeus that everyone of us in every way has to do, *for we are his offspring.*"[15]

Corroborating evidence for (*T1*) comes in the form of Hellenistic parallels, if not sources for the speech. For our purposes, it is enough to sample two.

(i) Dio Chrysostom presents a defense of the use of images in traditional Greek religion in his twelfth Olympic discourse, delivered in 96 AD before Phideias' statue of Zeus. Max Pohlenz argues that Dio is responding to the philosophically-based objections of the first century BC pantheist Poseidonios.[16] Since only the style and not the content of such speeches was expected to be original, we may assume that both sides of this issue of cult images had been traded in Athenian debates for some decades.

In his speech, Dio elegantly summarizes Poseidonios' position as to the five-fold source of our concept of God. First, inasmuch as the human mind somehow participates in or is part of the divine, it has an innate conception of the divine, which is the "common and general endowment of rational beings."[17] In this soil, secondary notions engendered in the stories and myths of poets take their root, as do the ideas enshrined in legislation.[18] Partially parasitic on these are ideas derived from the plastic arts (painters, sculptors, and stone masons).[19] Finally, there is the philosopher, "the one who by means of reason interprets and proclaims the divine nature, most truly, perhaps, and most perfectly."[20] Early human beings were in some sense closer, their innate idea of divine being as yet unobscured by the various secondary accretions. The job of the philosopher is to recall people to a more accurate conception.[21]

Corresponding to the innate concept of God and its development in experience is the natural good will and desire to serve and honor Him, which Dio Chrysostom movingly describes:

> "...the feelings of the human race, towards their first and immortal parent, whom we who have a share in the heritage of Hellas call Ancestral Zeus, develop step by step along with those which men have towards their mortal and human parents. For in truth the good will and desire to serve which offspring feel towards their parents is, in the first type, present in them, untaught, as a gift of nature and as a result of acts of kindness received, since that which has been begotten straight way from birth loves and cherishes in return, so far as it may, that which begat and nourishes and loves it..."[22]

Secondary overlays on this innate inclination are the poetic exhortations not to withhold our gratitude, and legal threats of punishment for those who refuse obedience.[23]

Dio then imagines the best sculptor, Phideias, being called before the court to answer the following question:

> "was the shape you by your artistry produced appropriate to a god, and was its form worthy of the divine nature, when you not only used a *material* which gives delight, but also presented *a human form* of *extraordinary beauty* and size, apart from its being a man's shape, made also *all the other attributes* as you have made them?"[24]

—a question the more urgent because the ancient forebearers did not produce such a statue: "was it...because they feared that they would never be able adequately to portray by human art the supreme and most Perfect Being?"[25] And Phideias rephrases the question,

> "whether it has been made with due respect to the dignity of the god and so as to be a true likeness of him, in no way falling short of the best portrayal of the divinity that it is within the capacity of human beings to make, or is unworthy of him and unbefitting?"[26]

For a Jew such a query is readily settled in the negative by the second commandment (Ex. 20:4-5).

Phideias readily admits that divine being as mind or intelligence cannot as such be painted or sculpted.[27] Nevertheless, "on account of our belief in the divine, all men have a strong yearning to honour and worship the deity from close at hand, approaching and laying hold of him with persuasion by offering sacrifice and crowning him with garlands."[28] Hence it is necessary to symbolize the invisible with the visible, and not just with heavenly bodies,[29] but also with statues and paintings. He then proceeds to explain his symbol-system. Unable to sculpt mind in itself, he makes a human as opposed to an animal body because the former and not the latter is a vessel containing intelligence.[30] This likewise shows "the kinship between the gods and men."[31] His sovereignty and kingship are symbolized by the strength and grandeur; His role as protector of cities and upholder of law, by majesty and severity; His fatherhood and solicitude, his friendship for the stranger, refugee, etc. by gentleness and kindliness of face; as God of wealth and giver of increase by His simplicity and grandeur.[32]

Viewing the matter from the law-giver's perspective, Seneca says that the best way to worship God is a high moral life, but traditional worship should be retained for social cohesion.[33]

(ii) *"Heraclitus to Hermodorus":* In the first (?) century BC Cynic epistle, one Heraclitus complains that he has been charged with impiety by those who lack knowledge of the true divine nature. Several lines resonate with the anti-idolatry speeches in Acts 14:15-17 and 17:22-31 (cf. 7:48-50):

> "...O you ignorant men, first teach us who God is so that when you speak of committing impiety you may be trusted. (2) *Where is God? Locked up in temples*? Pious indeed, are you who set up God in darkness! A man feels

> insulted if he is called a person of stone, but is a god truly spoken of when the honored name, "Out of the cliffs he was born," is applied to him? You ignorant men! Don't you know that *God is not made by hands*, that he has not from the beginning had a pedestal, and that he does not have a single enclosure but that the whole world, adorned with animals, plants, and stars is his temple?... Am I, then, not pious, Ethycles, I who alone know God, while you are rash and impious, for while you think that he exists, you suppose he is what he is not? If an altar of a god is not erected is there then a god? Are the stones witnesses of gods? His works, such as those of the sun, must testify to him. Night and day testify to him. *The seasons are his witnesses. The whole earth is a fruit-bearing witness.* The cycle of the moon, his work, is his heavenly testimony."[34]

Earlier, Zeno is said to have been of the same opinion, that "men shall neither build temples, nor make idols, for no edifice is worthy of the gods"; nevertheless, he may well have gone along with the popular cult in practice.[35]

From sources such as these, some commentators have concluded that the Areopagus speech is really a piece of Stoic philosophical theology. God is the Divine Logos immanent in the whole world (17:24, 28) who exercises providence by ordering everything (17:26). The human soul is some sort of part or participation of this divine Logos (17:25c, 28) and as such has an innate conception of God and a natural inclination to worship and serve him (17:27). The speech is then seen to draw the conclusion that worship involving images is wrong-headed (all Stoics agree that it is not the highest and purest), and the practical mandate that it should no longer be tolerated but stopped forthwith (as Heraclitus maintains, and as Zeno and Poseidonius would like to have encouraged, contrary to Dio Chrysostom). Some even see the hint of proofs for the existence and providence of God from natural regularities (17:26, 14:17) and human consensus.[36]

Nevertheless, if such parallels underwrite (*T1*), they arguably undermine the legitimacy of (*T3*) harmonizing the Acts story of Paul at Athens with the genuine Pauline epistles. For Pohlenz combines reflection on Hellenistic sources with an analysis of Romans 1-2 that shows Stoic conceptions to be at most marginal, if not antithetical to Paul's thought there, and concludes that the Areopagus speech is not genuinely Pauline but rather a Lucan inclusion.[37]

(3.2) *Biblical Background:* Resistant to the suggestion that the Areopagus speech is essentially pagan in its inspiration and meaning, other scholars have sought to show how its lines are grounded in fundamentally Biblical ideas. Their efforts have also born fruit.

The reference to "The God who made the world and everything in it, being the Lord of heaven and earth" (17:24ab) and to the fact that "he himself gives to all men life and breath and everything" (17:25c) seems to echo Isaiah 42:5:

"Thus says God, the Lord,
who created the heavens and stretched them out,
who spread forth the earth and what comes from it,
who gives breath to the people upon it and spirit to those who walk in it."[38]

The conclusion that God "does not live in shrines made by man" (17:24c) recalls the anti-Temple polemic of the speech of Stephen (7:49) with its appeal to Isaiah 66:1-2. The assertion that God does not need anything (17:25b) recalls Psalm 50:9-12:

"I will accept no bull from your house,
nor he-goat from your folds.
For every beast of the forest is mine,
the cattle on a thousand hills.
I know all the birds of the air,
and all that moves in the field is mine.
If I were hungry, I would not tell you;
for the world and all that is in it is mine."

with its anti-cult conclusions (Ps. 50:13-15).[39] Interestingly, God's self-sufficiency is juxtaposed with a prayer to preserve the Temple and its worship in II Maccabees 14:35-36:

"'O Lord of all, who has need of nothing, thou wast pleased that there be a temple for thy habitation among us; so now, O holy One, Lord of all holiness, keep undefiled for ever this house that has been recently purified.'"[40]

The claim that God "made from one every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth" can have reference to the creation of all humankind through Adam in Genesis 1-2.[41] Some have argued, convincingly, that the reference to his "having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their habitation" (17:26b) refers to God's activity of creating order out of chaos by fixing boundaries to the seasons of the year and to habitable portions of land.[42] In addition to the *P* account of creation in Genesis 1, this idea finds expression in Psalm 74:17—"Thou hast fixed all the bounds of the earth; thou hast made summer and winter"—as well as in Deuteronomy 32:8-9:

"When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance,
when He separated the sons of men,
He fixed the bounds of the peoples according to the number of the sons of God.
For the Lord's portion is His people,
Jacob His allotted heritage."

Other commentators have insisted that the reference is to God's providence over history.[43] In fact, there is no reason not to have it both ways.[44] The ambiguity of the line is a happy one, unifying a well-constructed speech: the

creation-interpretation gives a backwards connection to the opening lines about creation (17:24-25), while the historical reading links it to the reference to a new dispensation of history in 17:30. 17:27 could be taken as a response to divine initiative à la Isaiah 55:6—"Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near." The accusation and proclamation in 17:30-31 echo both Psalm 98:9— "...the Lord, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with equity"—and Daniel 7:13:

> "I saw in the night a vision,
> and behold, with the clouds of heaven
> there came one like a son of man,
> and he came to the Ancient of Days
> and was presented before him."[45]

Thus, it is argued that the Areopagus speech does not (contrary to adherents of (*T1*)) forsake Biblical ground to meet the Epicureans and Stoics on philosophical turf.

Closer examination of the structure of the Acts speeches lends further support to the latter contention. From a rhetorical point of view, they divide into three sections: *an introduction*, which includes some reference to the situation and a litany of God's activity up to the present; *an accusation*; and *a proclamation* of the Gospel.[46]

Important for our purposes is the fact that not every speech in Acts includes every part, and sometimes one component is braided together with another (see the chart on page 150). For instance, the speech of Stephen in chapter 7 contains no proclamation, presumably because it is a speech of judgment, provoking an action that sustains the guilty verdict, although one could perhaps find proclamation in Stephen's dying request, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them" (7:60). Again, Peter's speech before Cornelius and his household in chapter 10 contains no accusation, perhaps because these models of Gentile piety had hearts already turned towards God (being neither Christ-killers nor idol-worshipers), or because they regularly repented, or because hearing and believing were simultaneous. The proclamation is also cut short by the descent of the Holy Spirit (10:44).

Against this background, the omission or drastic abbreviation of the Gospel proclamation in the Areopagus speech—the absence of the names 'Jesus' and 'Christ' as of any mention of His earthly career—can be reconstrued. (i) Some suggest that Luke intended "to picture the sermon as having been interrupted and prematurely ended by the controversy over the resurrection."[47] After all, Luke is "aware of the resurrection as explosive enough a topic to interrupt even the proceedings of the Sanhedrin (see Acts 23:1-10)."[48] Bruce conjectures that the speech as we have it may be more a *praeparatio* than an *evangelium*.[49] (ii) On the other hand, given that Paul was taken to the Areop-

agus to explain his teachings about Jesus and the resurrection further (17:18-19), it seems to me unlikely that Luke means to imply that the speech was cut off when the topic was barely introduced. The transition in 17:31-32 seems compatible with an implicit longer account, the rehearsal of which Luke might have omitted for literary reasons, his readers having become familiar with the Gospel proclamation from chapters, 2, 4, 10, and 13.[50] Moreover, I Thessalonians 1:9-10—"...how you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come"—makes 17:31 credible as a summary of a longer proclamation. Gärtner falls in with this reading when he opines that "Luke is only reproducing the gist, and Paul doubtless said more than we read in chapter 17."[51] Whether the speech is understood as interrupted or abbreviated, it would still be one designed to have a proclamation of the *kerygma* as its goal and the rest of the speech should be understood as headed in that direction.

4. *Missionary Preaching: The Meaning of the Areopagus Speech*

More recent commentators have located the Areopagus speech in the genre of missionary preaching. Wolfgang Nauck compared the sermon with texts from the early church, with Jewish literature, with a mission tract of Aristobulus, and with the writings of Paul, and found that of the eight themes of Acts 17—creation, conservation, the glorification of God, the recognition of God, ignorance, repentance, judgment, and salvation—at least one occurs in each of the other types of literature and three—creation, the glorification of God, and repentance—are common to all. He concludes that Acts 17 is in line with Jewish and Christian missionary preaching generally, and Shields[52] and Barrett[53] agree. This characterization should not surprise us, since it is as a missionary sermon that Luke presents it!

A missionary's task is a difficult one, because s/he must work at the interface of two cultures. And this leads us to the recognition that the above-mentioned dichotomy between Hellenistic and Biblical parallels is a false one.

(4.1) *Hermeneutical Observation:* In ancient times, the authority of a revered text lay in the words. People were bound to accept the words of the text, but not necessarily held to assign them a fixed meaning. Accordingly, in both pagan and Jewish circles, it became customary to distinguish levels of meaning in interpreting authoritative texts (such as the Pentateuch or Homer): the literal, the moral, the predictive, the typological, and the allegorical. Sometimes it was argued that while the literal meaning of the OT or Homer seemed unworthy of the Divine, the moral, predictive, typological, or allegorical meanings contain gems of truth to be discovered by those who are not low-minded or hard-hearted.[54]

This hermeneutical atmosphere gives rise to certain strategies of persua-

sion. Since opponents may agree on a form of words, but not share common beliefs, a debater might take a line from an authoritative text to which each assents, draw out consequences from it that depended on his/her own (rather than the opponent's) interpretation, hope that his/her adversary would come to see the authoritative text from a new angle, and buy his whole package—text plus interpretation.

This procedure is illustrated by Luke's use of OT proof-texts in the earlier speeches. Jewish audiences had interpreted Psalm 16:10 as a reference to David's longevity, but Luke's speakers expound it as a prophecy of the Messiah's resurrection (2:25-35; 13:35-37). These preachers know that any Jew who wished to "stick to his guns" could reject the argument from authority; but they hoped that their unexpected interpretation would get their Jewish-hearers to understand their Scriptures in a new way—by allowing their rich and diverse traditions to be re-focussed by the earthly career and subsequent exaltation of Jesus—and to convert, as many reportedly did (2:41; 4:4; cf. Lk 24:25-27).

So here, where the Areopagus speech chooses texts from Greek poets, lines that the preacher might assume would have authoritative status with or at least command the respect of his hearers, and yet lines to which he could give an acceptable Jewish/Christian construal. We need not assume that because the words admit of a Stoic interpretation, the missionary preacher who used them believed them under that rendering, or that he became a Stoic for the moment, that he might win some. It is precisely because the lines of the sermon are polyvalent, admitting as they do of multiple readings, that the speech affords any possibility of apologetic success.[55]

(4.2) *Application:* In Luke's text, the Athenian missionary sermon attempts to persuade its audience (i) to unite against the idolatry of popular Greek religion (17:16, 23, 29), and (ii) to turn to the true worship of God, who raised Christ Jesus from the dead and appointed Him eschatological judge of the earth (17:29-30). This anti-idolatry theme—sounded already in Acts 7 in Stephen's anti-Temple polemic (7:42-50) and renewed in the pagan context at Lystra where Barnabas and Paul are taken for Zeus and Hermes (14:8-18)—brings first victory (19:11-20) and then persecution (19:23-20:1), and recurs at the end of the story (28:3-6). As I see it, the speech works its purpose through two stages.

First, the speaker manipulates disagreements within his audience to his own end.[56] Whereas in chapter 23 Paul throws down the gauntlet of the resurrection to pit Sadduccee against Pharisee and distract both parties from their common opposition to Paul, here the speaker appeals to his audience to learn from one another and come to agreement on the issue Paul raises. He wants the Stoics, with their refined conception of God, to receive instruction from their Epicurean colleagues regarding the evils of popular religion, presuppos-

ing as it does that the gods can be influenced by the "bribes" of incense and sacrifices (17:24-25). Yet, in their turn, the Epicureans should take a page from the Stoics as well as from popular religion, and withdraw their mistaken notion that the gods are remote, utterly uninvolved in our world, whether for good or ill. The Stoics are right to see Divine providence intimately involved in every detail of nature and history; and the impulse of popular religion evidences the fact that humans were made for relationship with God. Finally, the speaker wants the adherents of Greek religion to accept philosophical enlightenment as to the true nature of God, and to "wake up" to the inappropriateness of their worship-behavior. This effort (i) to unite his audience against the idolatry of Athenian religion takes on added significance if indeed it was spoken before an official governing body of Athens, whose members had the power to influence public policy on these matters (see section 2 above).

If successful at the first stage, the speaker then wishes to imbed this result within a framework that ends with a proclamation of the Christian *kerygma*, with the hope that his hearers will suddenly see not only the poetic proof texts, but also the other lines of the speech in that new light. Thus, talk about God's creation and establishing boundaries (17:24-26) would not be seen pantheistically, but in terms of the God who brings order out of chaos through His Spirit (Genesis 1). The reference to the unity of humankind (17:26) would make backwards reference to the story of Adam as to the present and future in which the gospel is for all (2:21; 10:36; 11:18; 13:47-48; 16:6-8). The kinship between humans and God would already be understood in terms of God's creating us in His own image (Gen. 1:27) and would take on new meaning in view of God's raising and exalting the man Jesus to His right hand (17:31). The nearness of God to man would not be a metaphysical necessity but the fulfillment of Divine promise in pouring out His Holy Spirit to all who believe (2:1-21, 38; 9:17; 10:44-48; 11:15-18). Even the lines surrounding the quote from Epimenides—"They fashioned a tomb for thee, O holy and high one—...But thou art not dead, thou livest and abidest forever"—would take on a new predictive aspect, finding their fulfillment in the death and resurrection of Jesus!

5. *Missionary Success—Areopagus Hill and Now:*

Luke-Acts is a success-oriented book; its post-Pentecost accounts punctuated by the declaration, "the word of God grew and multiplied" (12:24; cf. 2:47; 6:1; 9:31; 12:24; 19:20) and climaxed by the triumphal announcement of Paul's open and unhindered missionary work in Rome (28:30-31). Like most sermons in Acts, the Areopagus speech produces a division in its audience: some mocked; some wanted to hear more; and a few, including some notables (Dionysius, a member of the governing council, and Damaris) believed

(17:32-33). If the Epicureans had not been convinced of the nearness of God by the Stoics, how much less by a preacher of foreign religion (17:18) who warns Greeks to abandon their traditional cult, enforced as it was by fear of legal and supernatural penalties, with alternative fearsome news of impending Divine judgment. For the Epicureans, fear and bad morals were the pernicious fruit of religion. And if the Stoics thought untrue and unworthy the myths and stories of their own poets, full of incarnations as they were, how unlikely that they should be won over by foreign stories of resurrection from the dead. To most such philosophers, the Christian story would scarcely have seemed a live option. Paul established no church in Athens, and the Acts-story records no more philosophical sermons. Does Luke himself (leaving harmony with the genuine Pauline epistles aside) mean thereby to agree (*T4*) and (*T5*) that the proclamation of Christ can make no use of culture, that philosophy can make no contribution to Christian apologetics after all?

Not necessarily. For Lucan perspective would see the "definite plan and foreknowledge of God" (2:23) proceeding with subtlety and great irony, selecting missionaries to match their audiences. Paul was a Diaspora Jew, a Jerusalem-trained Pharisee (22:3), and a tradesman who supported himself by making tents (18:3). Scarcely surprising, then, if the Holy Spirit led him to one Diaspora synagogue after the other, or to spend more of his time in commercial cities than in "university" towns. To get any further with those Epicureans and Stoics, would require a fellow-philosopher, someone who was not foreign to the field, but able to meet them at a collegial level, to give as good as s/he got in philosophical disputes. I submit, the Paul of Acts does not pursue his mission to the Athenians, for the simple reason that he was not a philosopher.

By contrast, we members of the Society of Christian Philosophers are. We are called to grasp and work the polyvalency, not of authoritative texts, but of philosophical intuitions, to learn the flexibility with which they can be adapted to theological as well as secular philosophical theories. Our task is not that of proving the coherence of surprising ideas with already accepted Scriptures. Rather we attempt to commend the rationality of Christian belief by developing theological theories of mathematics, metaphysics, aesthetics, and morals in enough detail and with enough rigor to compete successfully with their secular analogues in the market-place of ideas. To the extent that we thereby exhibit the intelligibility, consistency, and theoretical fruitfulness of our religious convictions, we remove philosophical road blocks to credibility, collaborate with the Holy Spirit in preparing a way (cf. Lk 3:4) that can be travelled to conversion. We do not expect our philosophy, like the Acts-sermons of Peter and Paul, to produce rapid changes of mind and heart; the rate of conversions produced by our efforts is not apt to be greater than that of the Areopagus speech. Yet, the sermons in Acts do not forget how

centuries of salvation history were needed to prepare the harvest they saw (Lk 10:2; Acts 3:13, 18, 22-25; 7:2-53; 13:17-26). Our role, as we enter into an era of secularization and of the marginalization of Christianity, is more to be compared to that of the prophets who prepared the way for a harvest they did not see. It does not belong to us to know "the times or the seasons" (1:7) when Christian philosophy will once again dominate the field. Our role is simply to bear witness to the power of Christ by letting Him transform our philosophy, to give testimony as much in Athens as in Jerusalem, even (why not?) to the end of the earth (1:8).

University of California, Los Angeles

NOTES

1. *Nave's Topic Bible: A Digest of Holy Scriptures* (Lincoln, Nebraska: Topical Bible Publishing Company, 1902) builds this interpretation into its concordance entry for 'philosophy' (957). It is still found in recent popular commentaries (e.g., Eugenia Price, *Learning to Live from the Acts* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1970, 96-99; and William H. Willimon, *Acts: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988), 142-45; and at least in part in David John Williams, *Acts: A Good News Commentary* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 302).

2. Cf. the short speech at Lystra, where only these activities are mentioned, 14:15, 17.

3. Bruce E. Shields, "The Areopagus Sermon," *Restoration Quarterly* 20 (1977), 23-40.

4. C. K. Barrett, "Paul's Speech on the Areopagus," in M. E. Glassweel and E. W. Fashole-Luke, *New Testament Christianity for Africa and the World: Essays in Honour of Hamy Sawyer* (London: SPCK), 66-77; esp. 70.

5. Barrett, "Paul's Speech on the Areopagus," *loc. cit.*, 71.

6. As Bertil Gärtner claims in his *The Areopagus Speech and Natural Revelation*, Uppsala, 1955, 48. In fact, the Stoics were, but the Epicureans were not so prominent.

7. Barrett, "Paul's Speech on the Areopagus," *loc. cit.*, 72.

8. F. F. Bruce, "Paul and the Athenians," *The Expository Times* 88 (1976), 8-12.

9. Cf. Gärtner, *The Areopagus Speech and Natural Revelation*, 53.

10. Bruce, "Paul and the Athenians," *loc. cit.*, 9.

11. Bruce E. Shields, "The Areopagus Sermon," *Restoration Quarterly* 20 (1977), 23-40; esp. 24, n. 6.

12. Barrett, "Paul and the Athenians," *loc. cit.*, 70.

13. Gärtner, *The Areopagus Speech and Natural Revelation*, 58.

14. Bruce, "Paul and the Athenians," *loc. cit.*, 10. Italics mine.

15. *Ibid.*

16. Max Pohlenz, "Paul und die Stoa," *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 42 (1949), 69-104; esp. 93-95.

17. Dio Chrysostom, in "The Twelfth, or Olympic Discourse" in *Works*, Translated by J. W. Cohoon. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1939), v. II, 42-87.

18. Dio Chrysostom, "The Twelfth, or Olympic Discourse," *loc. cit.*, 43, 45, 49.

19. Dio Chrysostom, "The Twelfth, or Olympic Discourse," *loc. cit.*, 49, 51.

20. Dio Chrysostom, "The Twelfth, or Olympic Discourse," *loc. cit.*, 53.

21. Max Pohlenz, "Paulus und die Stoa," *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 42 (1949), 93-95.

22. Dio Chrysostom, "The Twelfth, or Olympic Discourse," *loc. cit.*, 45.

23. Dio Chrysostom, "The Twelfth, or Olympic Discourse," 47.

24. Dio Chrysostom, "The Twelfth, or Olympic Discourse," *loc. cit.*, 57. Italics mine.

25. Dio Chrysostom, "The Twelfth, or Olympic Discourse," *loc. cit.*, 59, 61.

26. Dio Chrysostom, "The Twelfth, or Olympic Discourse," *loc. cit.*, 61.

27. Dio Chrysostom, "The Twelfth, or Olympic Discourse," *loc. cit.*, 63.

28. Dio Chrysostom, "The Twelfth, or Olympic Discourse," *loc. cit.*, 65.

29. Dio Chrysostom, "The Twelfth, or Olympic Discourse," *loc. cit.*, 63.

30. Dio Chrysostom, "The Twelfth, or Olympic Discourse," *loc. cit.*, 63.

31. Dio Chrysostom, "The Twelfth, or Olympic Discourse," *loc. cit.*, 79.

32. Dio Chrysostom, "The Twelfth, or Olympic Discourse," *loc. cit.*, 79.

33. Gärtner, *The Areopagus Speech and Natural Revelation*, 204.

34. Abraham J. Malherbe, *The Cynic Epistles: A Study Edition* (Missoula, Montana, Scholars Press, 1977), 191-93. Italics mine.

35. Gärtner, *The Areopagus Speech and Natural Revelation*, 203-4.

36. 17:26a, 27. Cf. Pohlenz, "Paulus und die Stoa," *loc. cit.*, 84-87; Rejected by Gärtner, *The Areopagus Speech and Natural Theology*, 41-44, 146-58.

37. Pohlenz, "Paulus und die Stoa," *loc. cit.*, 97-98.

38. Shields, "The Areopagus Sermon," *loc. cit.*, 34.

39. Bruce, "Paul and the Athenians," *loc. cit.*, 9.

40. Shields, "The Areopagus Sermon," *loc. cit.*, 34, note 36.

41. Gärtner, *The Areopagus Speech and Natural Revelation*, 151.

42. Shields, "The Areopagus Sermon," *loc. cit.*, 34 (reference to Eltester). Cf. Gärtner, *The Areopagus Speech and Natural Revelation*, 141 (reference to Dibelius), 147.

43. Gärtner, *The Areopagus Speech and Natural Revelation*, 146-47.

44. Bruce, "Paul and the Athenians," *loc. cit.*, 10.

45. Bruce, "Paul and the Athenians," *loc. cit.*, 10.

46. Shields, "The Areopagus Sermon," *loc. cit.*, 24; cf. Bruce, "Paul and the Athenians," *loc. cit.*, 11, for the distinction between *praeparatio* and *evangelium*.

47. Shields, "The Areopagus Sermon," *loc. cit.*, 25.

48. *Ibid.*

49. Bruce, "Paul and the Athenians," *loc. cit.*, 11.

50. Shields, "The Areopagus Sermon," *loc. cit.*, 25.

51. Gärtner, *The Areopagus Speech and Natural Revelation*, 49-50.

52. Shields, "The Areopagus Sermon," *loc. cit.*, 34, 37-38.

53. Barrett, "Paul's Speech on the Areopagus," *loc. cit.*, *passim*.

54. Cf. J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrine* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1958), chapter III, 69-78; and Harry Austryn Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Church Fathers: Volume I: Faith, Trinity, Incarnation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964), chapters II-III, 24-96.

55. Cf. Barrett, "Paul's Speech on the Areopagus," *loc. cit.*, 72-73.

56. Barrett, "Paul's Speech on the Areopagus," *loc. cit.*, 72-76.

Speech	Acts 2: 14-36	3:12-26	5:29-32	7:1-50	10:34-43	13:16-41	17:22-31
Introduction:							
situation	2:15	3:12,16	5:29		10:34-35		17:22-23
God's action		3:13-18	5:30-32	7:1-50	10:36-43	13:17-31	17:24-28
Proof texts	2:17 (J1 12: 28-32) 2:25-28 (Ps 16:8-11) 2:34 (Ps.110:1)			7:42 (Am. 5: 25-27) 7:49-50 (Is.66: 1-2)	all prophets (10:43)		"In him we live..." (17:28) "We are his offspring." (17:28)
Accusation:	2:23,36	3:13-15	5:30	(past) 7:35-50 (present) 7:51-53		Warning (13:40-41)	17:29-30
Proclamation:	2:38	3:19-26	5:31-32		10:42-43	13:32-33, 38,39	17:31 ?
Proof texts		3:22 (Dt. 18: 15-15) 3:25 (Gen. 22: 18)				13:33 (Ps. 2:7) 13:34 (Is 55:3) 13:35 (Ps 16: 10) 13:41 (Hab. 1:5)	